



The Fine Arts Building and its annex to the right, as they appear today.

(Barbara Crane, photographer)

FINE ARTS BUILDING

410 South Michigan Avenue

Solon S. Beman, architect

Constructed in 1885

Converted to Fine Arts Building in 1898

The Studebaker Building

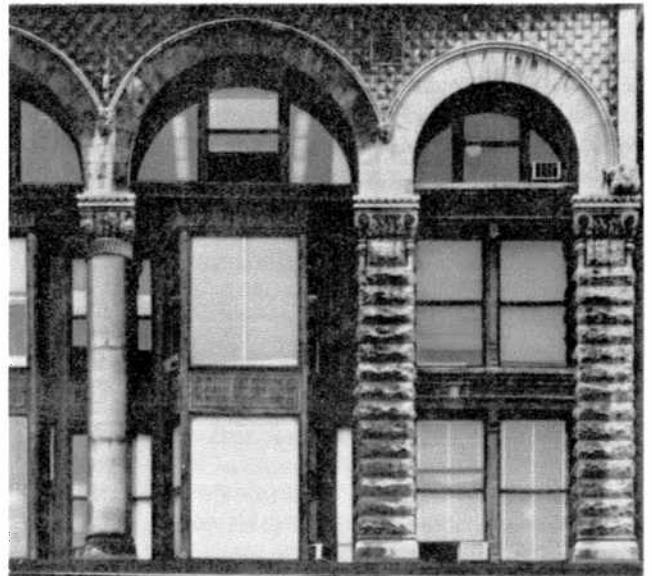
The five Studebaker brothers began manufacturing carriages and wagons in South Bend, Indiana in 1852. After the Civil War, convinced that Chicago would be the center of their retail business, they rented a showroom in the center of the city. In 1883, they began buying land on Michigan Avenue for their own building, one in which the carriage and wagon parts made in South Bend could be assembled and displayed for customers. They hired Solon S. Beman, the young architect of the newly constructed town of Pullman, to design their building.

Beman was then thirty-one years old and had been in Chicago for five years. He was born in New York in 1853 and at the age of fifteen had entered the office of Richard Upjohn, a prominent architect in New York City. Eight years later he opened his own office in that city. Through his friend Nathan F. Barrett, a New York landscape architect, Beman met George Pullman. Shortly afterward, Beman and Barrett were invited to come to Chicago for the purpose of designing and building an industrial town, just outside Chicago, for the Pullman Palace Car Company. Construction of Pullman, the first completely

planned company town in the United States, began in 1880 and was largely completed by 1884. In 1883, Beman designed a downtown office building for Pullman at the corner of Adams Street and Michigan Avenue (demolished in 1956). Impressed by these projects, the Studebakers chose Beman to design a building for them.

Beman designed a structure with a Romanesque facade. The Romanesque style had been popular in America from the mid-1840s through the 1860s, and it returned to popularity in a somewhat altered form in the 1870s and 1880s through the work of Henry Hobson Richardson. In the earlier period the style had been limited almost entirely to churches, but in the later decades it was used for houses and commercial structures as well. In 1872, Richardson had won the competition for Trinity Church in Boston, a structure that brought fame to its architect and re-established the popularity of the Romanesque. The predominant feature of the style is the round arch. Rough-faced stone is used on facades, resulting in a sense of weight and massiveness. An overall simplicity also characterizes the Romanesque mode as Richardson developed it. Carved ornament, usually limited to the capitals of columns, takes a spiky floral form, occasionally with some interlacing linear forms inspired by Celtic designs. Pyramidal roofs with rounded sides and conical roofs are used on the square or round towers which are often incorporated into the design.

The original roofline of the Studebaker Building is seen in this 1889 photograph.
(Courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society)



Several years after the Studebaker was converted into the Fine Arts Building, the multipaned windows were replaced with wide sheets of glass.
(Barbara Crane, photographer)

Originally eight stories high, the Fine Arts is a masonry structure with a facade of rusticated gray limestone on the upper floors and red granite on the first two floors. Because the lower four floors were to be used as showrooms, maximum natural light was desirable, and Beman was able to put surprisingly large windows in this wall-bearing building. In the upper stories, where the wagons and carriages were assembled, there were numerous smaller windows. The entrance to the building was in the center of the ground floor, a large pillar of polished granite on each side, with a display window and a round-arched opening, one filled with glass and the other a driveway, beyond each pillar. The capitals of the two columns and the area above the two arches are carved with a combination of spiky floral designs and interlacing lines. The arched windows on the fifth floor, with a checker-board pattern of small smooth and rough stone squares filling the area above and between the arches, terminate the lower portion of the building. The narrower windows of the sixth and seventh floors are flat-topped, but those on the eighth floor were each capped with an arch. The massive feeling produced by the rough stone of the facade is offset by the large windows, the smooth columns, and the carved trim.

The five bays of the facade are strongly divided by piers, except on the third and fourth floors in which the center bay is marked by two two-story columns of polished granite. Three pairs of small columns supplement the four center piers of the second floor. All the columns have typical Romanesque capitals.

The original attic story and roof of the Studebaker Building further extended the Romanesque detailing, combining several elements in a novel manner. The outer two bays projected above the three center bays, and each was topped by a pyramidal roof with concave sides. At the top of the three center bays were three pyramids. Between these five roofs the piers projected slightly, each with a conical cap.

When completed, the building attracted much attention and was described in guidebooks as one of Chicago's architectural masterpieces. A British architectural journal wrote that the Studebaker was one of the best American commercial structures, one that the British would do well to emulate. The building served the Studebakers well until the mid-1890s. A problem had developed in the late 1880s when the southeast corner began to sag during construction of the enormous Auditorium Building next door, but a way to halt the sinking was devised in 1891.

At about the same time, deciding that they needed more space, the Studebakers built a small five-story annex to the north of their building. The facade of the annex harmonized with that of the larger building: covered with rusticated stone, there was a large arch over the third and fourth floor windows and a small arch over each of the three fifth-floor windows. The top floor had three very small windows and a triangular gable with a finial at each corner. The annex was also in keeping with the building on its north side, the Romanesque-style home of the Chicago Club which was built by Burnham and Root in 1886-87 as the first building of the Art Institute. In 1892, the Art Institute had moved to a larger structure in what was to become Grant Park, and the Chicago Club took over the older building (demolished in 1929).

The annex, however, was not sufficient to relieve the space problems which the Studebakers faced, and in 1895 they commissioned Beman to design a new building for them at 623 South Wabash Avenue. There had also been rumors that many farmers were either hesitant or too lazy to go over to fancy Michigan Avenue to shop for wagons. On June 1, 1896 the company moved to its new headquarters.

Conversion to the Fine Arts Building

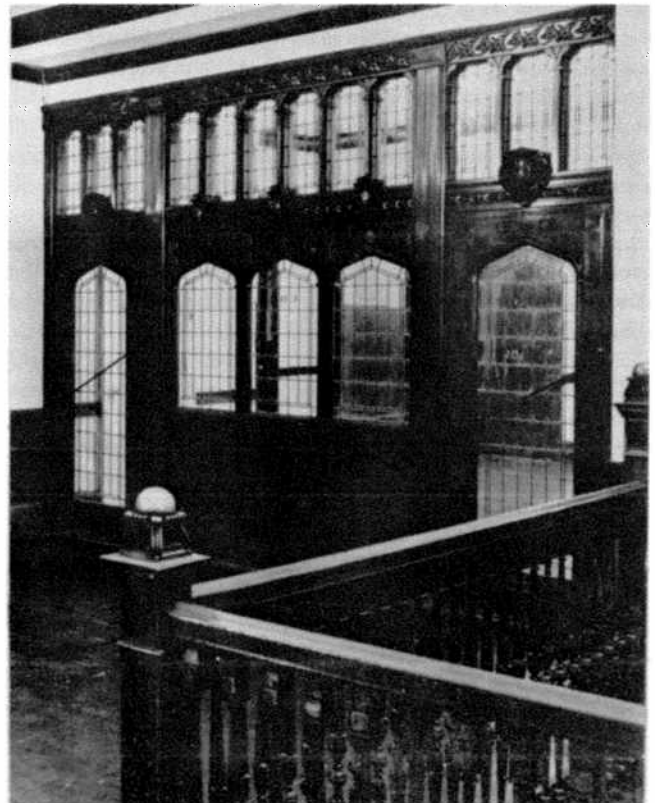
The Studebakers decided to retain ownership of the older building and convert it into studios and theaters. They were persuaded to undertake such a project by Charles C. Curtiss who became the building's manager under its new name, the Fine Arts Building. Curtiss, the son of a former mayor of Chicago, had had a successful career which combined business and the arts. He began as a clerk in the Field, Leiter and Company department store, later becoming a bookkeeper at the music store of Lyon and Healy. In the 1870s, he started a music publishing firm and opened a piano factory ten years later. He also built the Weber Music Hall, reputed to be the first building in the city designed exclusively for musicians' and artists' studios. Curtiss felt that the location of the Studebaker Building was perfect for the arts: on one side was the Auditorium Theatre, used by the new Chicago Symphony Orchestra, nearby was the new Art Institute in the lake-front park, and on Wabash Avenue there were numerous music stores, many of which contained studios for music teachers. In 1892, Judge Lambert Tree had built the Tree Studio Building on the city's Near North Side and demonstrated that a building for artists could succeed. (The Studios still stand at State and Ontario streets). Curtiss's abilities as a businessman and his familiarity with the arts helped convince the Studebakers that they could make a profit from such a project.

Beman was hired to undertake the renovation. On the first floor, the two arched openings became doorways, leading to two new music halls, and three storefronts were created facing Michigan Avenue. The roof, attic, and facade of the eighth floor were removed and replaced with a three-story addition, topped by several rows of molding and a flat roof. The second through tenth floors were filled with studios, shops, and offices, all soundproofed and fireproofed. Studios at the front of the building on the lower floors had large windows overlooking the park and the lake. The tenth-floor studios, intended for artists, had skylights and twenty-three-foot-high ceilings to accommodate large sculptures. This floor also contained a hall which was connected to the dining room of the Auditorium Hotel next door, providing additional space for the city's leading restaurant. Beman also created a large interior light well, running from the fourth floor to the roof. Named the Venetian Court because of its terra-cotta ornament, the court had a fountain at its base and planters at the fifth floor level.

The lobby walls were finished in scagliola, a plasterwork technique that imitates marble, and lined with exhibit cases and paintings. Carved benches, statuary, palms, and ferns decorated the upper halls. The stairway and all the elevator doors were designed to add to the attractiveness of the building. Each upper floor had a clock set in a carved wooden case near the elevators. Most of the studios had identical wood and glass doors, but certain larger suites or rooms had more exotic entryways.

Beautifully carved doors are found on several floors in the building. The newel posts on the stairs are covered with floral and musical ornament.

(Barbara Crane, photographer)





This photograph of 1909 or 1910 was taken from Grant Park. The Fine Arts Building and its annex are located between Adler and Sullivan's Auditorium Building of 1889, and Burnham and Root's Chicago Club, constructed in 1887 to house the Art Institute. The latter structure was demolished in 1929.

(Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago)

The First Twenty Years

The building opened in the summer of 1898, and it was soon well occupied. Coincidentally, a number of artists and cultural organizations who occupied space in nearby buildings had to leave their older quarters, and they moved to the Fine Arts Building. The annex was rented to two music schools, one of which was the Chicago Musical College, founded by Florenz Ziegfeld, Sr. By the summer of 1898, other occupants of the main building included a number of locally prominent painters; Lorado Taft, already the city's leading sculptor; and John T. McCutcheon, the cartoonist and illustrator. The art columns of the local newspapers wrote about what one paper called "the first art colony in Chicago," as more artists moved into the Fine Arts Building to work and to teach.

In addition to the musicians and artists, various organizations rented space. There were several religious groups and cultural associations. The Municipal Art League, a group of individuals and clubs interested in furthering art appreciation among the citizens of Chicago; the Public School Art Society, which sought to encourage art instruction in schools; and the Alliance Francaise, which promoted French art and culture in the city, had offices in the Fine Arts Building. A number of literary groups were tenants, and several women's organizations, including The Fortnightly of Chicago and the Daughters of the American Revolution, moved in during the early years. After the turn of the century, the Fine Arts Building became the center of the woman's suffrage movement in Illinois with the offices of the Equal Suffrage Association and the Cook County Woman's Suffrage Party.

The larger of the two music halls was soon converted into a theater, the Studebaker, and occupied for two years by the Castle Square Opera Company which performed operas in English at popular prices. It was then decided that lighter works would draw larger crowds, which was the case for the next six years. During this time, three plays by the Chicago writer George Ade were produced at the Studebaker and then went on to New York. These plays, in addition to the attention they brought Ade, made Chicago theatrically significant for the first time. The smaller hall, named the Music Hall, was used for recitals by local music teachers as well as for other performances and lectures.

One of Curtiss's reasons for encouraging the Studebakers to undertake the Fine Arts Building project was his awareness of the fact that artists frequently locate in the same area. He felt that within the building artists would be close together and able to interact to their mutual benefit. This indeed happened. Artists went to musical recitals and to dramatic readings; musicians went to teas and exhibitions in the artists' studios. One such gathering, which met on a regular basis, was the Little Room. Since 1892, a group of people involved in the arts had met after the Friday afternoon concerts of the Chicago Symphony. When the Fine Arts Building opened, this group began to meet in the tenth-floor studio of Ralph Clarkson, the city's leading portrait painter. Lorado Taft was a regular participant, as were John McCutcheon and his brother George Barr McCutcheon, the novelist. There were other writers in the group, including Hamlin Garland and Henry Blake Fuller. Several architects were also part of the Little Room: Irving and Allen Pond, Hugh M. Garden, and Howard Van Doren

Shaw. A number of commercial artists attended, including Frank X. and Joseph C. Leyendecker, German-born designers who were nationally known for their magazine illustrations; Joseph Leyendecker was later known particularly for his drawings for the Arrow Collar Company. The two brothers were tenants in the building for three years. During that time they organized the painting of murals around the tenth-floor stairwells by several of the artists who had studios on that floor. Eight murals, each done in the individual style of its painter, were produced.



This mural by Frank X. Leyendecker was painted next to the door of the studio in which the Little Room met.
(Paul W. Petraitis for the Chicago Historical Society)

Other commercial artists, several of whom became prominent in their field, had studios in the building. One such person was William W. Denslow. He became acquainted with L. Frank Baum, an advertising writer who also wrote children's books, and they collaborated on several of these. In 1900, they put together what became their best-known work, *The Wizard of Oz*.

Along with its artists and musicians, the Fine Arts Building contained craft studios and shops. Chicago was one of the most important centers of the Arts and Crafts movement in America, and the Fine Arts Building was a center of local craft activity. Ralph Fletcher Seymour was a designer and publisher who printed classical works with hand-made type on handmade paper. Mrs. Hobart C. Chatfield-Taylor, whose husband was a writer and member of the Little Room, opened a bookbindery named the Rose Bindery. In 1910, a group of craftspeople formed the Artists'

Guild and opened a cooperative shop, the Fine Arts Shop, on the sixth floor, then taking over the whole north annex in 1915. The famous Kalo Shop, devoted primarily to silver work, was located in the Fine Arts Building from 1903 to 1907 and again from 1920 to 1924.

Curtiss actively sought various publications as tenants to complement the writers and literary concerns already housed in the building. By 1903, the Chicago offices of the *Saturday Evening Post* and several other nationally distributed periodicals were located in the building. One of the best known was *The Dial*, founded in Chicago in 1880 and respected as a significant literary journal with a conservative point of view. Its editor, Francis Fisher Browne, also operated a bookshop on the main floor of the building between 1907 and 1912. The store was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright who had an office on the tenth floor during part of 1908.

Two magazines with editorial viewpoints in opposition to that of Browne's *The Dial* were founded in the building. In 1911, Harriet Monroe began *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* which was published for its first four years in Ralph Seymour's studio. Among the poets introduced to a sizable audience through *Poetry* were Vachel Lindsay, Carl Sandburg, T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound. In 1914, Margaret Anderson started *The Little Review*, the most avant-garde and controversial literary journal of its time. Shortly after moving the magazine to New York in 1916, Anderson published James Joyce's *Ulysses* in serial form. The result was international fame for *The Little Review* and an obscenity trial for its editor.



The ninth-floor clock.
(Barbara Crane, photographer)

Theatrical activities in the Fine Arts Building included not only the commercial Studebaker Theatre but also two more experimental ventures. One of the first tenants in the building was Anna Morgan, a prominent drama teacher. In her studios she put on the first American performances of certain works by George Bernard Shaw and Henrik Ibsen. Between 1912 and 1915, Maurice Browne, an Englishman, and his Chicago-born wife, Ellen Van Volkenburg, ran the Chicago Little Theater in a fourth-floor room which they converted into a theater of just under one hundred seats. The little theater movement took up the European idea of producing in small theaters those plays, either classical or new, which appealed to limited audiences. During its five-year existence, the Little Theater produced forty-four plays, twenty-five of them for the first time in America.

Experimental lighting and stage design techniques were developed there and widely imitated. The Little Theater was the first art theater to tour the country, but too extensive a schedule led to the financial difficulties that were a major factor in the theater's demise.

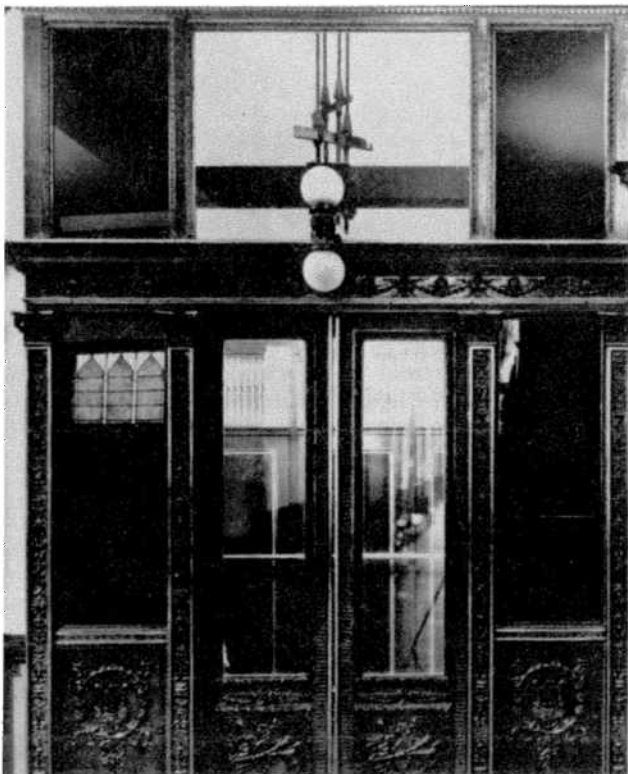
Changes in the Fine Arts Building

In 1903, the Studebaker family sold the building to a group of investors who intended to maintain the building as it was; the Studebakers retained a majority of the stock in the new Fine Arts Corporation until 1915. In 1909, the north annex was completely remodeled. The Romanesque facade was removed, wide windows replaced the narrow openings, and an extra floor was added between the first and second stories. The roof was fitted with skylights, and the top floor became an art gallery which Frank Lloyd Wright designed during that year.

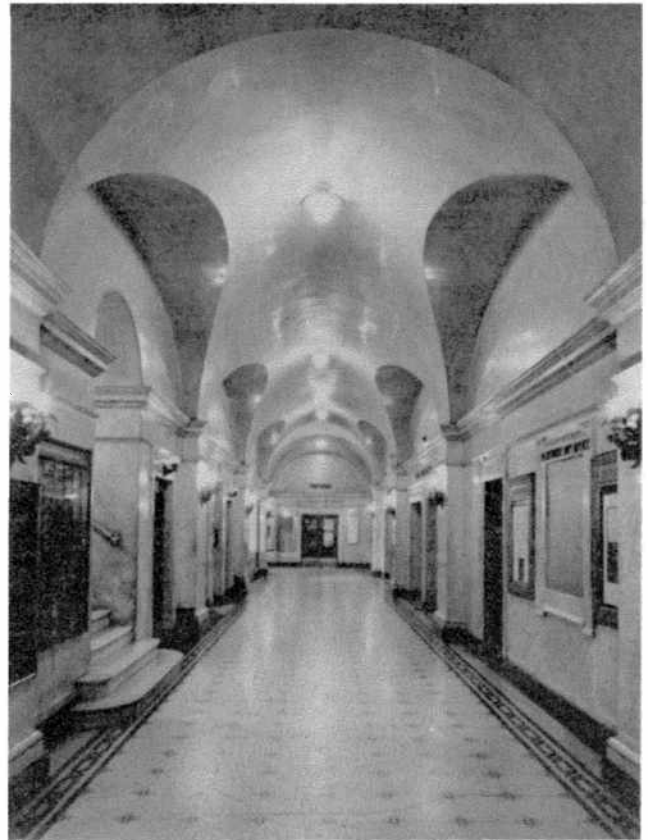
The corporation was dissolved in 1915 after selling the building for \$3,000,000, the largest single real-estate sale in the city's history to that date. Two years later, the new owners extensively remodeled the Studebaker Theatre which had not been doing well financially since 1906. The architect for the project was Andrew Rebori who would later be known for the originality of his architectural work during the 1930s. Rebori was also responsible for a second annex added to the Fine Arts Building in 1924. This narrow six-story structure, located on the west side of the main building with its facade on Wabash Avenue, was connected to the larger building by an enclosed bridge at the fourth

Elevator doors are ornamented with the forms of musical instruments and several types of molding. The interiors of the elevator cars also have their original decorations.

(Barbara Crane, photographer)



floor level. The upper floors were used for studios, but the real reason for this annex was to have a basement which could contain a furnace for the main building. From 1898 until 1924, the building's heat had been piped in underground from the Auditorium Annex (now the Americana Congress Hotel) south of the Auditorium Building.



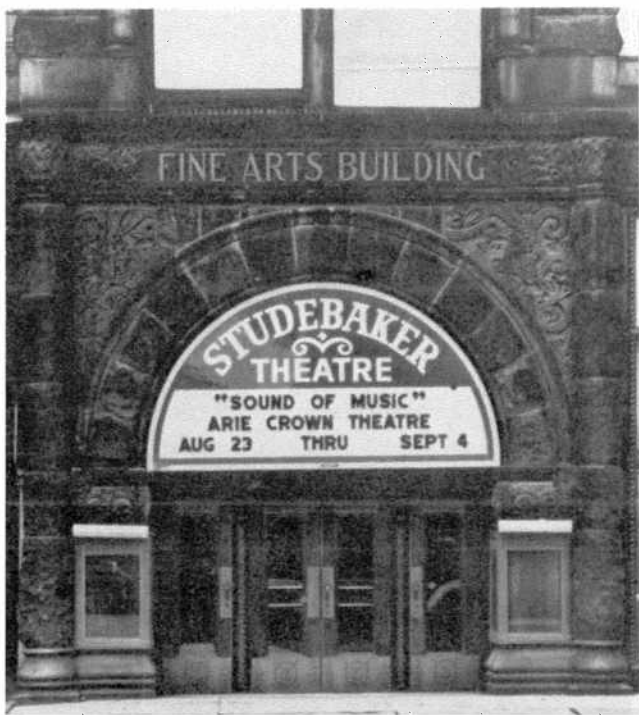
The ground-floor hallway is finished in scagliola. The original light fixtures are still in place along the walls. The two music halls are located at opposite ends of the corridor, to the right of the hallway as seen in this photograph.

(Barbara Crane, photographer)

The Fine Arts Building Since 1920

After 1920, a number of the original tenants moved out of the building and others left the city. The Venetian Court was converted into a tearoom named the Piccadilly. The Fine Arts Building had been in existence for more than twenty years, and while new tenants rented space, the character and feeling of the place had changed. Lorado Taft moved to the Midway Studios because he needed more space; John McCutcheon, working for the *Chicago Tribune*, moved to the new Tribune Tower; The Fortnightly moved to the Bryan Lathrop House (120 East Bellvue Place, designated a Chicago Landmark on May 9, 1973); and in 1928, Charles Curtiss died. The Little Room met through the 1920s, but its momentum was gone. The theaters continued to present problems. The smaller one, renamed the Playhouse in 1922, was turned into a movie theater in which primarily foreign films were shown. The renovation of the Studebaker did little to help it; for several years it was used for vaudeville shows.

Since the 1930s the building has suffered from various financial troubles and has been sold a number of times. It has remained, however, a building of artists, musicians, and several religious groups. Remarkably, the building has been almost untouched through the years. The exterior has hardly been altered. The cresting on the roof has been removed, and a large sign obscures the two granite columns which flanked the original entrance. But the name "Studebaker," carved into the stone above the location of the original entrance, can still be seen. The statues and plants may be gone from the halls, but little else has changed. The tenth-floor murals, the ornate doors and hall clocks, the ornamental stair railings and elevator doors all still remain, as does the fountain in the Venetian Court. The first-floor lobby has its original marble walls and a motto inside each entrance, "All passes - ART alone endures." The Fine Arts Building, a work of art itself as well as a home for the arts, endures. It is one of only two buildings Beman designed in the downtown area that survive today (the other is the second Studebaker Building on Wabash Avenue). With the Auditorium on its south side and the Chicago Club's present building (constructed in 1930 when part of the building by Root collapsed during remodeling in 1929) on its north, the Fine Arts Building completes a block of structures unified by common stylistic features. It is an important reminder of Chicago's cultural heritage, a building with a strong and unique character which is felt by anyone who walks through it.



The southern doorway into the Fine Arts Building was a show window when the building was constructed for the Studebakers. The interlacing linear ornament used in Romanesque revival structures is seen above the arch.
(Barbara Crane, photographer)